



PUBLIC PERCEPTIONS ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS IN ROMANIA



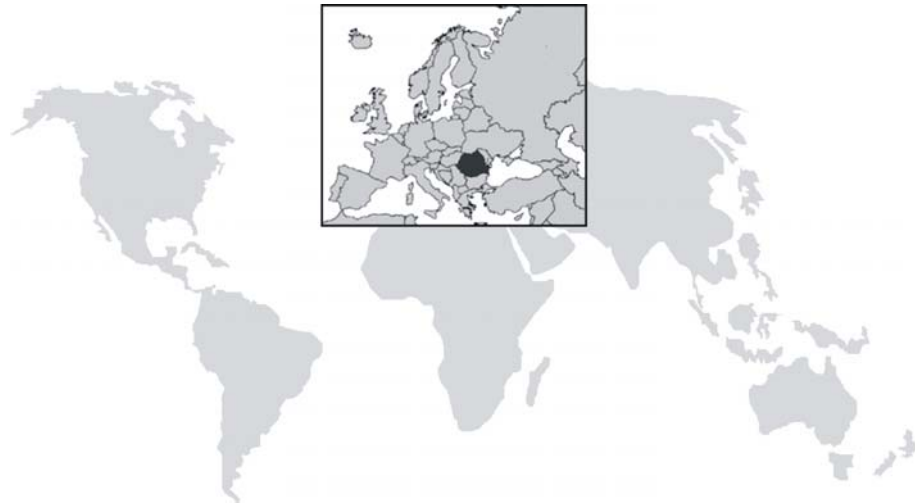
Institutul pentru Politici Publice
București



***“Foreign Policy isn’t something that is great and big,
it’s common sense and humanity as it applies to my affairs and yours.”***

Ernest Bevin
U.K. Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs
(1945-1951)

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Transatlantic Center
for Central and Eastern Europe

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Public Perceptions on Foreign Affairs in Romania is a public survey whose results are commented by independent experts and which includes the main conclusions of an analysis regarding the opinions of the Romanian elite with regards to foreign policy of Romania and international relations in a broader sense. The survey as well as the Elite Opinions' Analysis are two major achievements of the project named *Romanian Perspective on Transatlantic Trends*, a project implemented by the Institute for Public Policy (IPP), Romania thanks to the financial support of the German Marshal Fund of the United States (GMF).

German Marshall Fund of the United States is (GMF) is a non-partisan American public policy and grant making institution dedicated to promoting greater cooperation and understanding between the United States and Europe.

The Institute for Public Policy (IPP) Romania, is a think-tank whose goal is to assist the development of Romania's democratic process through extensive primary research, fostering open discussions and unbiased public policy analysis.

Several experts were involved in the elaboration of the survey's questions. We would like to thank Mr. John Glenn, Director of Foreign Policy - the German Marshal Fund of the United States (Washington D.C. Office), Mr. Adrian Moraru, Project Director - the Institute for Public Policy, Mrs. Monica Tobă, Project Coordinator - the Institute for Public Policy, Mr. Alexandru Toth, Project Coordinator, the Gallup Organization Romania.

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Finally, IPP would like to thank all representatives of central public institutions, of the non governmental organizations, of the media whose opinions were very important in the elaboration of this material.

INTRODUCTION

As NATO member and a step away from becoming a full-fledged EU member-state, Romania becomes more and more of an international player. Meeting, on the one hand, the responsibilities which derive from this new position and, on the other, the globalizing tendencies which have characterized the international relations of the last decades, Romania has left behind the isolation it knew during the last years of communism. In parallel, and inside, Romania becomes a more and more democratic state. Perhaps the pace of democratization is slower than the one expected by many or maybe democratic progress has not always had a noble reason behind it, but this is a true fact: **Romania is a developing democracy** and we have all the good reasons to say that the democratic process in Romania is now irreversible.

In this particular context, the Institute for Public Policies, through its specialized programme, aims at carefully examining the foreign policy of Romania, as well as those developments in the international political arena which have a direct impact on Romania. One of the IPP objectives in this direction is orienting the foreign policy towards the citizen. After all, foreign policy is one of the state's public policies and the citizens should relate to it accordingly. To this effect, IPP considers that a bridge between the Romanian political and administrative elite who decides and executes Romania's foreign policy, on the one hand, and the citizen, on the other, must be built. Within the relationship between the citizen and the authority, the parties must know very well each other's options. **So far, the authorities have done very little in order to find out the opinions of the Romanian citizens on matters of foreign policy and, consequently, they disregarded almost completely their views when they decided on such matters.** IPP considers that this situation must cease. Within a genuine democracy, the authorities and the public opinion must communicate also on matters which regard the international assertion of Romania's interest.

Of course, foreign policy is not done necessarily with one's eyes focused on polls - political leaders are elected so as to be able to manage the country's international relations and they are held accountable for that. But public support for actions of foreign policy is crucial. As one can see, the maturity of democracies in the Euro-Atlantic space, where we belong both in cultural and in formal terms, consists of an increasingly serious „publicization” of foreign policy. Foreign policy ceases to be a chancellery and well insulated cabinets policy and it becomes more and more a concern for the citizens. Not only did the quantity and quality of the services delivered by Western civil society organizations specialized in international relations grow significantly over the last 15-20 years, but public opinion also became more and more concerned with this problematique as well as more and more sensitive to the foreign policy decisions made by the government. Against this background, one has to admit that in Romania **no government which came to power after 1990 made any consistent effort to involve in the country's foreign policy making process any of the intellectual resources available in the citadel.** Foreign policy still remains an area which seems open only to the political layer of society (even there still, to a very small extent) and to a small number of *academia* experts and the media.

A much broader segment of the public opinion must be trained to develop a certain attitude with respect to Romania's foreign policy, as it already has with respect to other public policies, such as taxation, health or education. Such attitudes must be voiced clearly and the government must get acquainted with them. Likewise, public opinion must know exactly the views of the political elite on matters related to Romania's foreign policy. Starting from this belief, **the current study is an exercise of knowledge**, one of its kind in Romania, both in its method and in its scope. We hope that such exercises become a routine in the Romanian public space.

Today, **a democratic state is credible and strong as far as international relations are concerned, only if its foreign policy enjoys public support.** Public support lent to foreign policy is a must not only for the stability of a certain governmental formulae, but also for the rationale of that state's foreign policy abroad. Moreover, **Romania's interests cannot be separated by any means from the interests of Romanians.** And the governing bodies, irrespective of their political color, are called upon to defend and to promote those interests.

GENERAL BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

The current paper is the result of a complex study undertaken by the Institute for Public Policies (IPP) and developed on two tiers. On the one hand, it aimed at identifying the citizens' opinions on a range of major topics regarding Romania's foreign policy and the international political arena, and on the other, it was meant to examine - by comparison - the citizens' responses in relation to the opinions of certain personalities who belong to the Romanian political elite.

The opinion poll, implemented by Gallup Organization Romania and commissioned by IPP, was the main instrument to identify the citizens' opinions. The questions were formulated by the IPP experts, based on consultations with the Gallup Organization ones, after a period of consultation with major stakeholders in Romania's foreign policy, experienced journalists in the field and independent analysts. Likewise, during the question formulation stage, IPP has consulted yet other relevant information sources, especially those regarding Romania's transatlantic relations, and enjoying the expertise of The German Marshall Fund of the United States, an American organization acknowledged for its yearly publication of an opinion poll, *The Transatlantic Trends*. As a matter of fact, a range of questions included in the IPP poll can be analyzed by comparison to the ones mentioned in the GMF transatlantic poll.

In parallel to this, IPP has selected a number of 18 questions from the public opinion poll which were then asked of certain personalities from the Romanian political elite, to see to what extent do the citizens' opinions match the opinions of the people who run Romania's foreign policy. Thus, IPP has made up a list of political life personalities who, by their positions and their experience, have contributed significantly to shaping Romania's foreign policy. The list consists of 33 key political figures: the President of Romania and his most prominent advisers in the field, the Prime-Minister and his corps of experts, the managing bodies of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of European Integration and the Ministry of National Defense, the heads of the intelligence services involved in this area, the heads of the foreign policy Parliament committees as well as MP's from the same committees, who, due to their political careers, have an important say in the debates which take place in these committees.

During the month of August, almost at the same time with the implementation of the public opinion poll by Gallup Organization, IPP has invited all the 33 people selected to answer in person the questions from the questionnaire, collecting in the end 18 answers. Certainly, IPP does not mean that such an opinion „poll” is representative in statistical terms, for the entire Romanian political elite, as a genuine public opinion poll would be, or for all the Romanian foreign policy decision-makers, for that matter. Nevertheless, we do have the answers of 18 high-level dignitaries of the Romanian government, including the President of Romania, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, the Minister of European Integration, the Chairman of the Foreign Policy Committee in the Senate, the Chairman of the Foreign Policy Committee in the House of Deputies, some advisers to the President and several important Secretaries of State. As there is no scientific foundation for the statistical representation of the replies collected from the

selected respondents, we have made use of the information extracted from the questionnaires in order to highlight certain trends (for instance, 16 or more respondents have given a particular answer) among the members of the elite. As such, we will highlight in each chapter of our study the manner in which the political personalities who were kind enough to reply to our questionnaire. We will underscore only the diverging or converging views of the respondents, as compared to the strictly scientific results of the public opinion poll. We will mention the opinion trends and tendencies of the elite by using italics against a darker background and, whenever we will use the word „elite” in this book, we will refer to the 18 respondents from our questionnaire.

The material resulted from the opinion poll, in other words from the analysis of the Romanian political elite opinions, represents, according to IPP, a substantial ground for discussion during certain public debates and in order to facilitate the decision-making process in the field, respectively. In fact, this has been the final objective of the entire project developed by the Institute for Public Policies this year; in the period following the publication of this study, several debates were organized both in Romania and in Brussels, with Romanian and foreign political leaders concerned with formulating and pursuing the best foreign policy options for Romania.

Thus, the intention of IPP and GMF, to build a communication bridge between the citizens and their political leaders, with regard to major decisions for Romania's foreign policy, can become reality.

METHODOLOGY

- **Size of sample:** 1,050 persons aged 18 and over
- **Type of sample:** two-stage, stratified, probabilistic (random) sample
- **Stratification criteria:** 18 cultural areas grouped according to historical regions, living environment (urban-rural) and size of urban localities (4 types)
- **Sampling:** probabilistic (random) selection of the sampling locations (102 polling sections in 87 localities) and of the people. To select the people, the latest polling lists were mainly used.
- **Representation:** the sample is representative for the adult non-institutionalized population of Romania, with a tolerable error margin of $\pm 3\%$ and a 95% probability of result guarantee.
- **Validation:** the sample was validated based on the National Institute of Statistics data and on the 2002 population census.
- Interviews were conducted at the respondents' place of residence.
- Apart from the sampling errors, the way to formulate questions and the practical difficulties related to the data collection process in the field may generate yet other errors meant to affect the survey results.
- **Field survey:** August 29, 2005 - September 9, 2005.

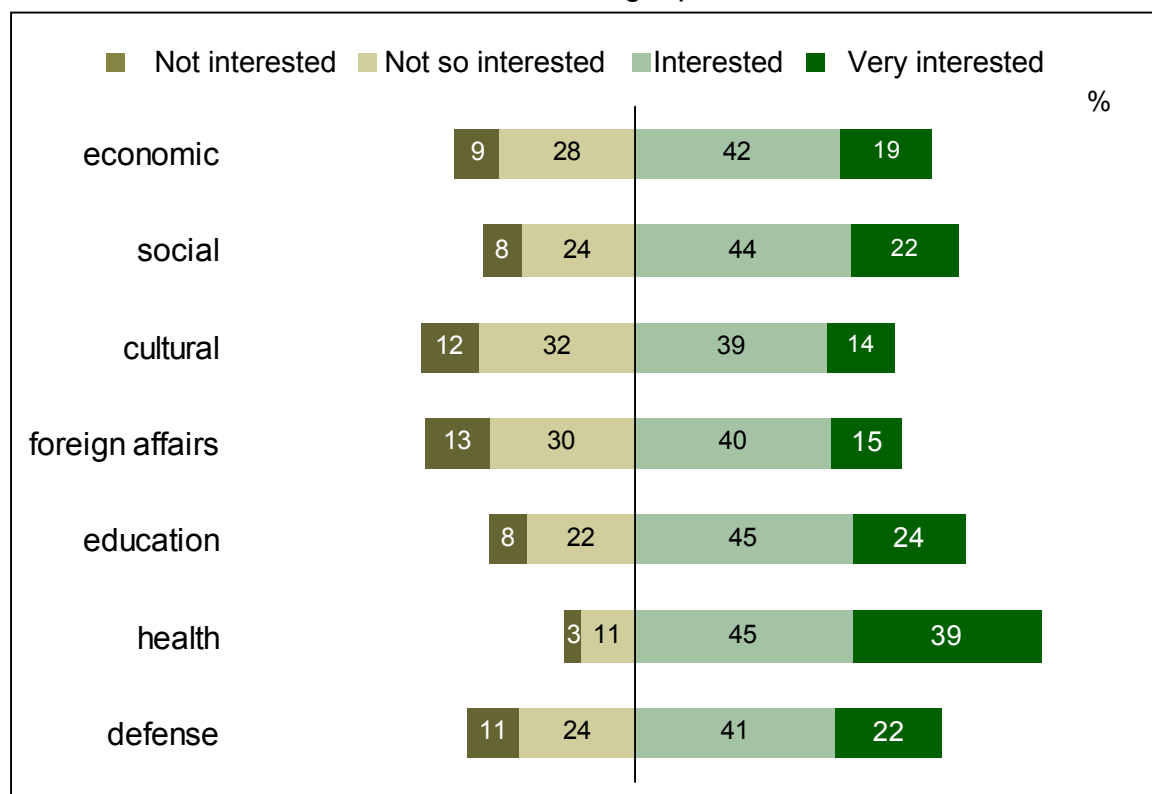
KEY FINDINGS

- Compared to other public policies, as well as to policies in the medical, social or economic fields, **the interest for foreign policy is low**. The interest for matters related to the defense policy is greater, and almost equal to the one for economic policies. In this context, the level of information of Romanian citizens on matters of foreign policy is consequently rather low. 14% consider themselves well and very well informed, while 54% consider themselves relatively well informed. One can see that quite a large number of respondents (about 15%) do not know how to answer the questions or do not give answers at all.
- **Romania's foreign policy during the last 15 years is evaluated in negative terms by 51% of the Romanians** and in positive terms by 35%. Almost half of the respondents believe that diplomacy succeeds in promoting Romania's interests abroad. In this context, we can also note that the **majority of those who have used the services provided by Romanian embassies and consulates abroad have been satisfied with their services**.
- **To Romanians, the President is perceived as is the main decision-maker on matters of foreign policy**. Likewise, one can note that the European/EU governments as well as the American government hold, according to the perception of Romanian public opinion, a great influence with regard to our foreign policy. On the other hand, **citizens consider that their opinion has very little influence on the country's foreign policy**.
- **67% of Romanians believe that at present there is no serious threat to our national security**. Only 21% think there is. Of the latter, 80% believe that terrorist networks represent the main threat. Consequently, very few believe that defense is a priority from the budget point of view.
- **NATO holds in majority terms a good and very good image (64%)**, although less than half of the citizens believe that the NATO membership generates more advantages than disadvantages. The presence of American military bases in Romania shall have an impact on Romania, is the opinion of slightly more than half of Romanians. From the latter, 61% think that there is an increased danger of a terrorist attack against Romania, and only 35% of them believe that the presence of American military bases will make the opponents of American policies become the opponents of Romania as well.
- **About half of the Romanian population believes that we should participate with troops to international missions, while a little over half believe that we should take part, generally speaking, to solving international problems**. At present, the population tends to disagree with the presence of Romanian troops in the missions they are already engaged in (Iraq, Afghanistan, Bosnia and Kosovo). Isolationist tendencies are pretty high.

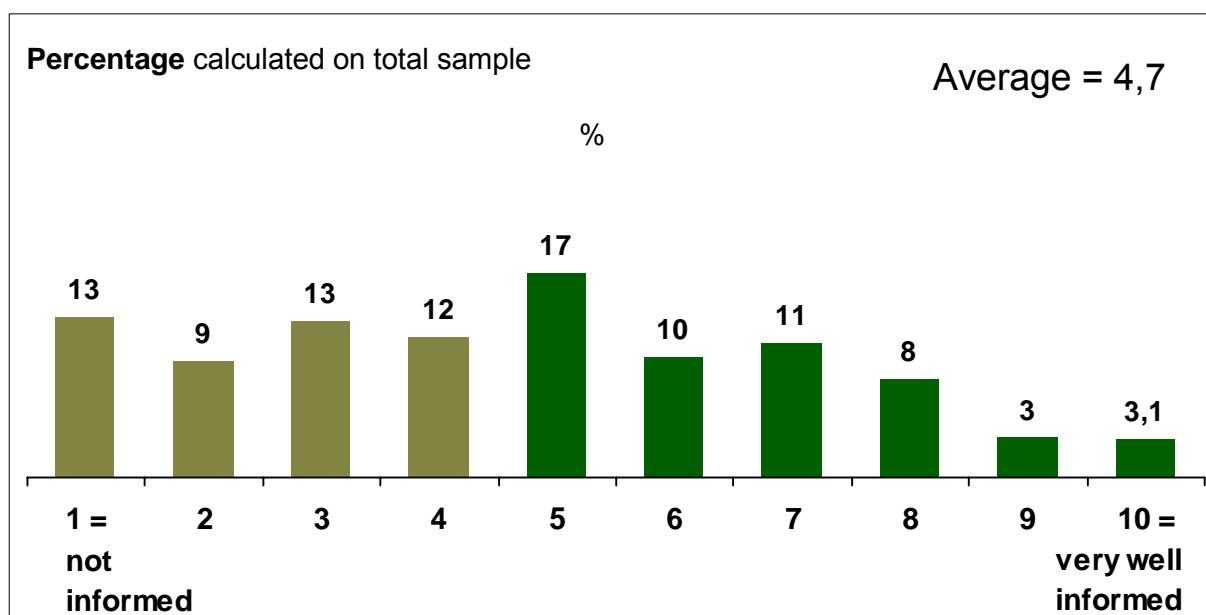
- In general terms, **the Romanian public opinion is more inclined towards multilateralism and cooperation**, but a large majority (76%) think that if Romania is attacked it should fight back even without NATO's consent.
- **The EU enjoys a very good and an overwhelmingly good image** (70%). EU membership is perceived especially as an economic issue and the causes of a potential delay in the accession process are due, according to most Romanians, to ourselves. The vast majority of the population does not think that Romania will join the EU in 2007, but they believe that the accession will take place by 2010.
- **Most Romanians think that we should not pay any special attention to any of our neighbors.** The overwhelming majority believes that the policy towards the Republic of Moldova was „not so good”, „bad” or „very bad”. The relations with the Republic of Moldova are considered to be „moderate, neutral” by a number of people equal to those who consider them to be „friendly”.
- From a list of countries that are immediately relevant to Romania, Romanians have **the warmest feelings towards Italy and Spain and the coldest ones towards Arab countries and Russia.**
- Generally speaking, **the opinions of Romanians about all international organizations are highly positive**, to the extent to which they have heard about them.
- According to the views of most Romanians, **terrorism is still the greatest threat for Europe.** The security arrangements must be made within the transatlantic space, and Europe must gain a greater military force in order to be on an equal footing with the United States in this partnership.
- The means for fighting terrorism are still under debate. **Opinions are divided quite evenly between those who believe that military action is the best method and those who think that the best solution is economic aid given to the areas which generate terrorists.**
- In terms of their axiological profile, **Romanians are attached to democracy** - 75% believe that democracy is a universal value, applicable to all countries, and only 48% believe that democratic countries should enforce democracy in non-democratic countries.

I. GENERAL OBSERVATIONS

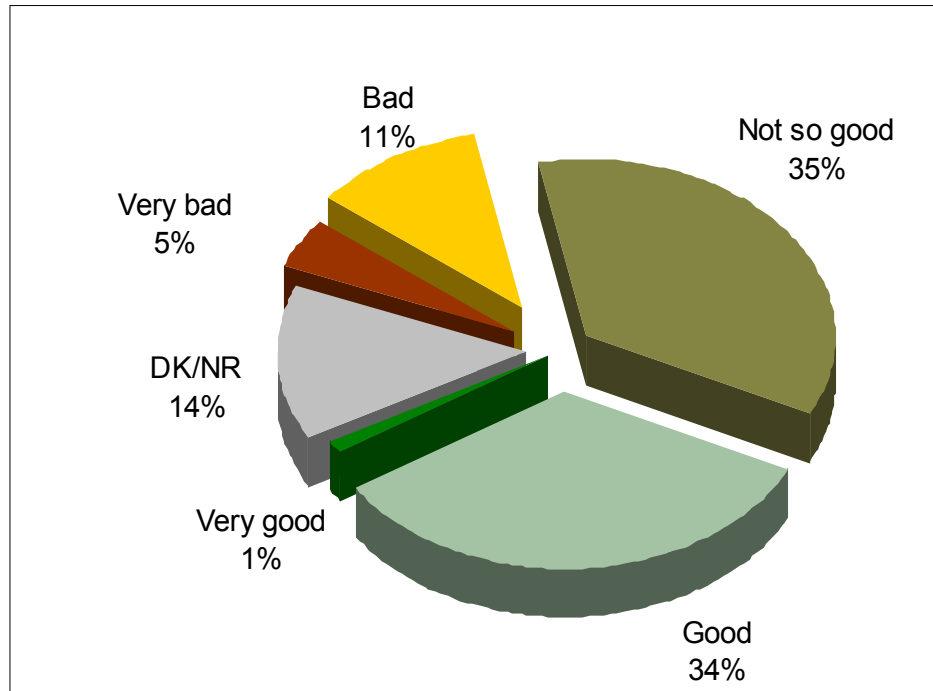
How interested are you in the news regarding the following topics? How interested are you in the news regarding the following topics?



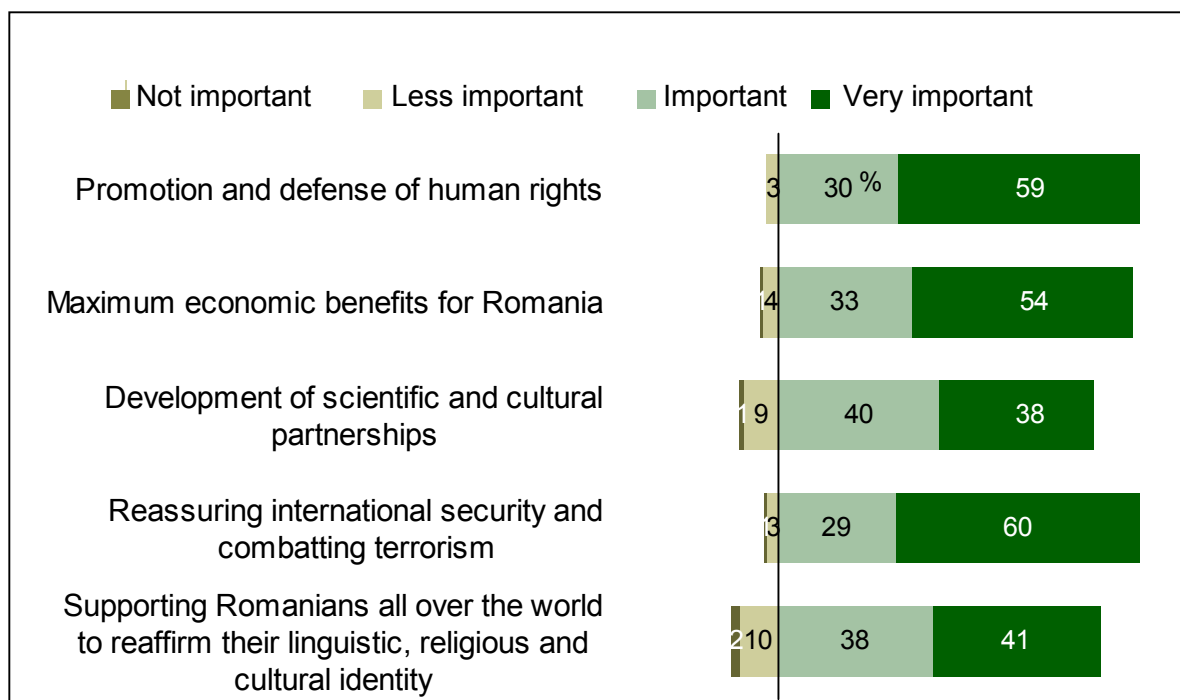
On a scale from 1 to 10, how informed do you think you are on Romania's foreign policy?



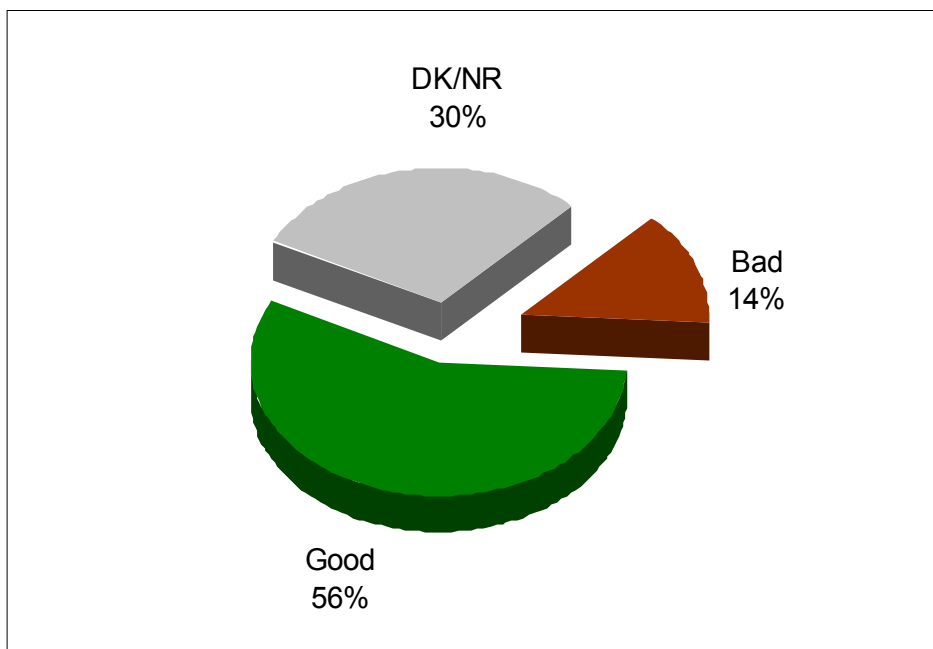
What is your general opinion on Romania's foreign policy in the last 15 years?



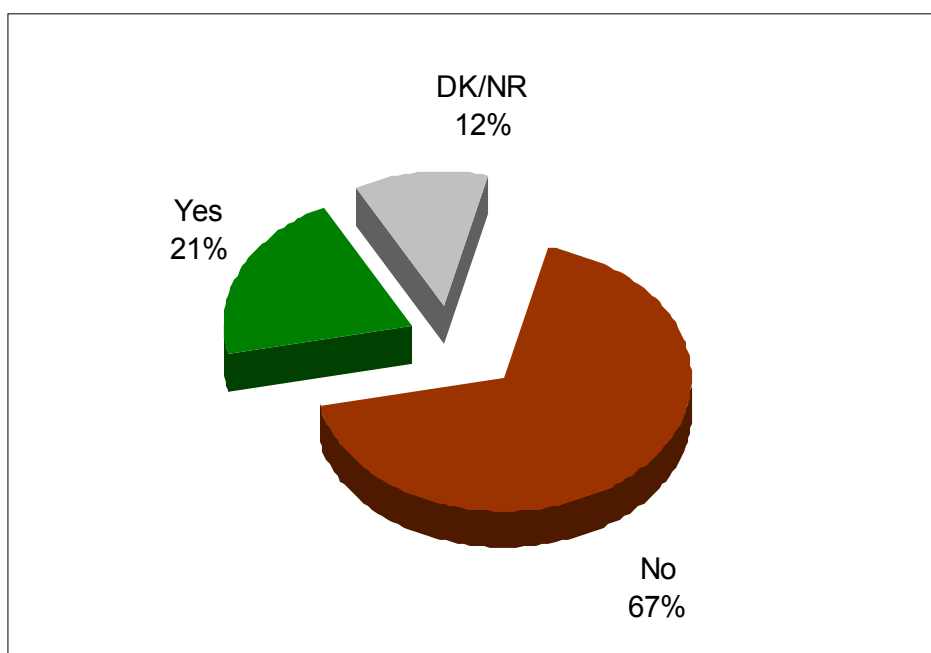
These are some objectives on which Romania focuses in order to establish relations with other countries. In your view, which ones are important for Romania's foreign policy?



In the last months, President Băsescu mentioned several times the idea of a Bucharest-London-Washington axis. Do you think it is a good or bad idea?

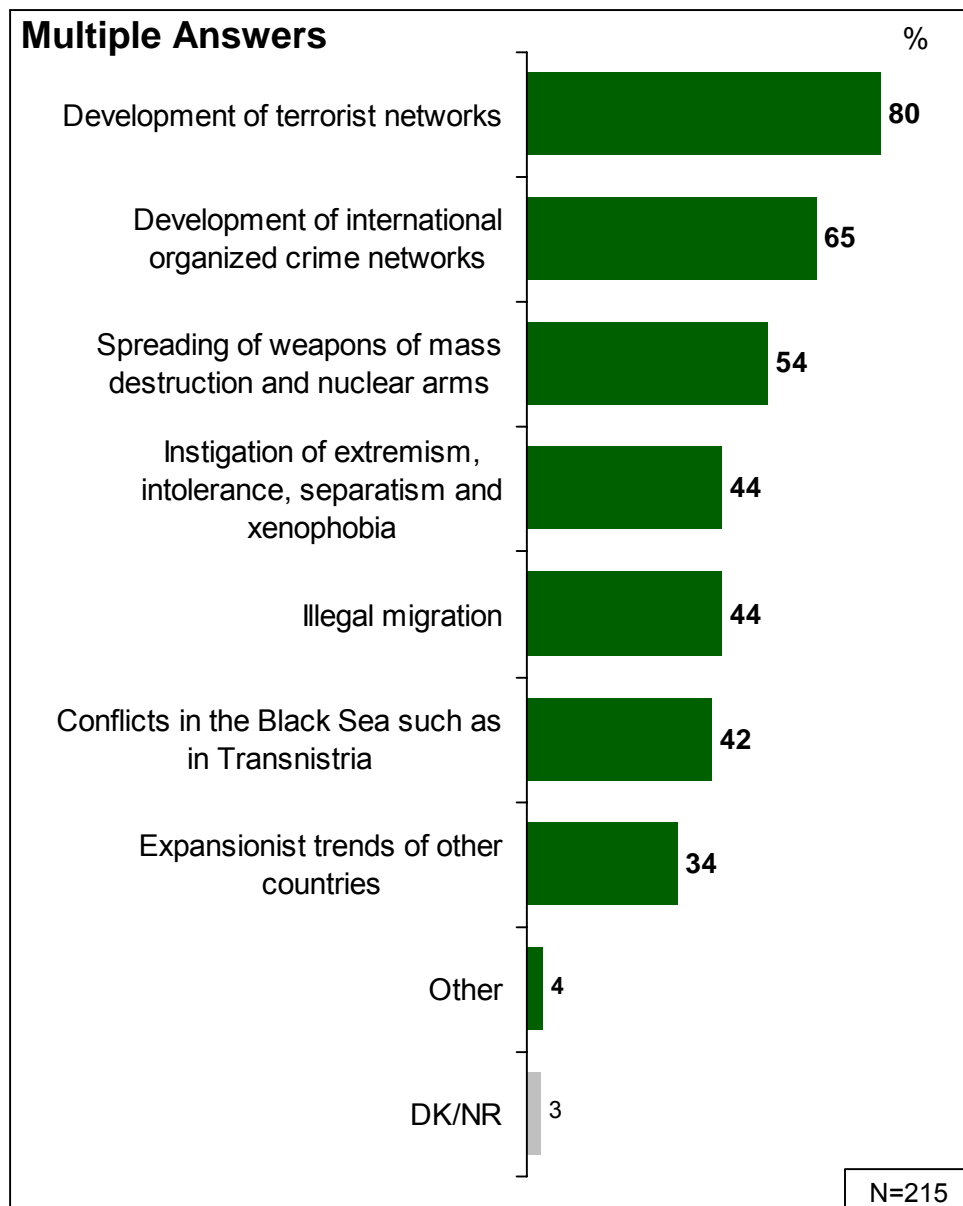


Do you consider that it exists a serious threat to Romania's national security?

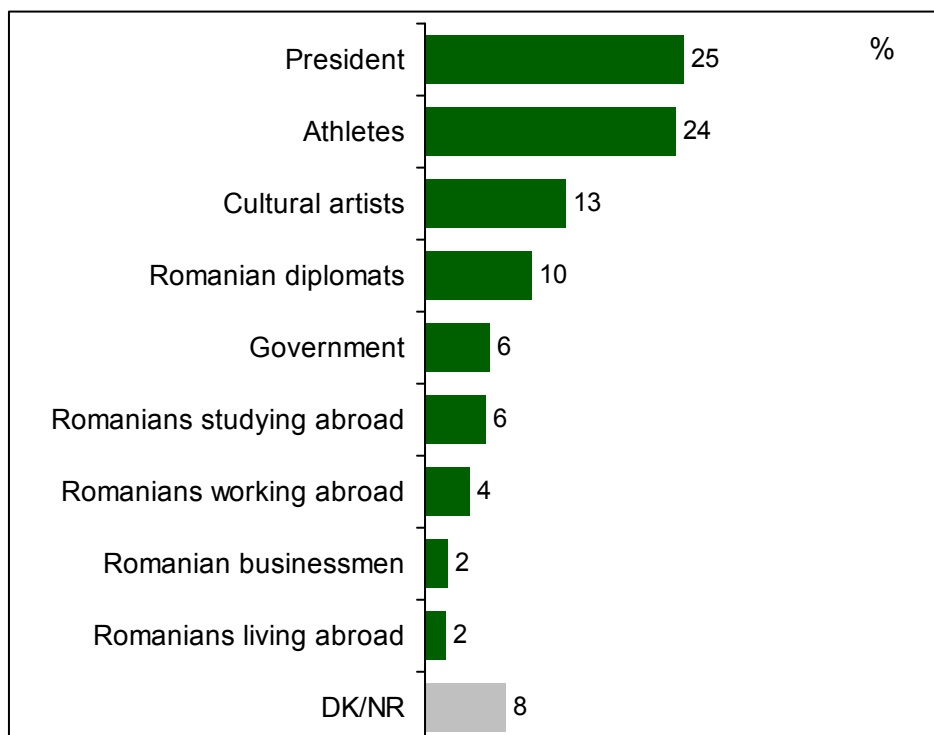


[Only if "Yes, I consider it exists a serious threat to Romania's national security"]

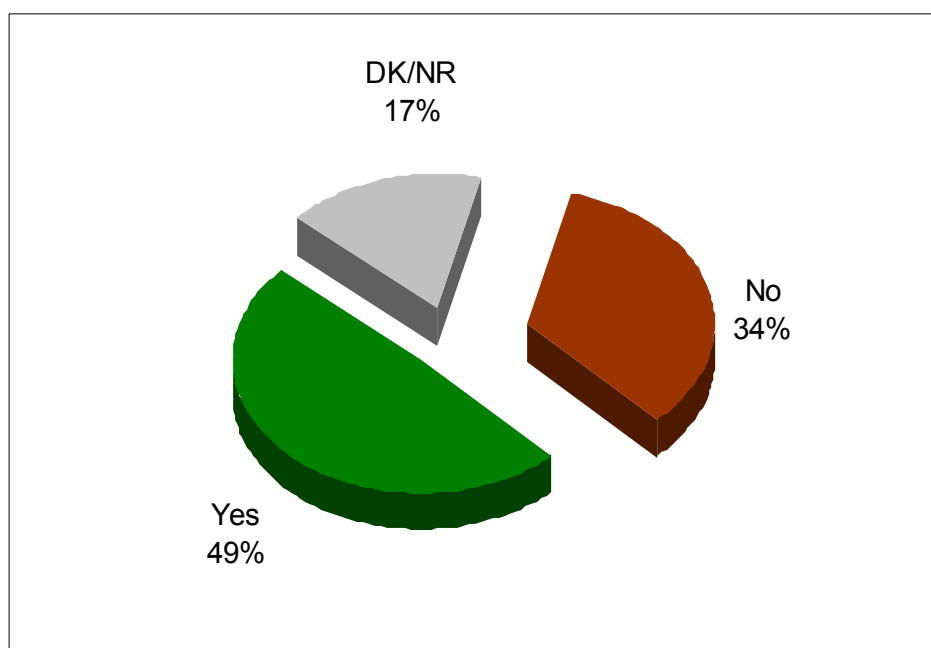
Which one of the following do you consider as a serious threat to Romania's security?



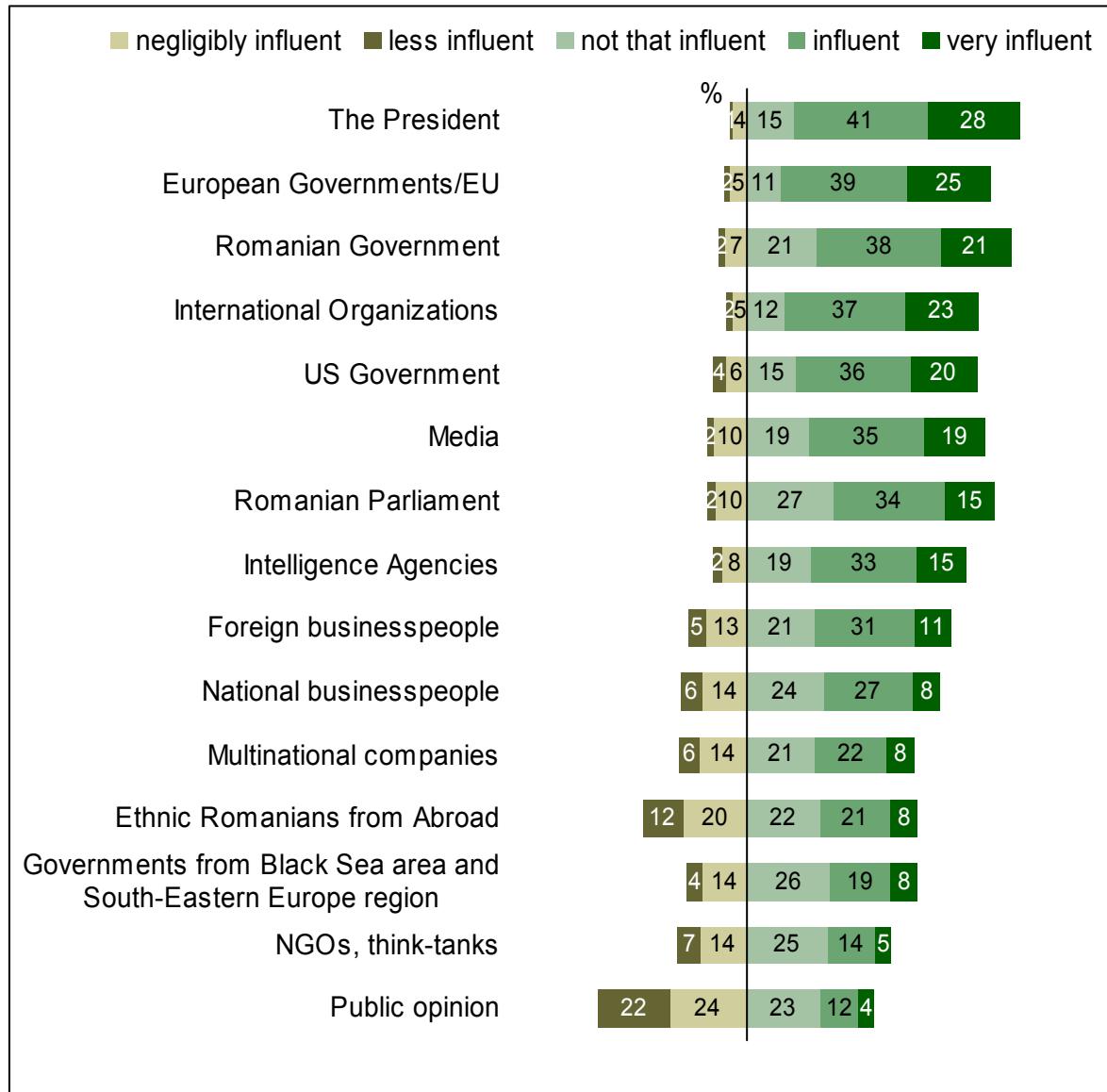
In your opinion, which of the following institutes/associations promote the best image of Romania abroad?



In general, do you believe that Romanian diplomacy is successful in promoting Romanian interests abroad?



How influent are the following institutions or individuals
in shaping Romania's foreign policy?

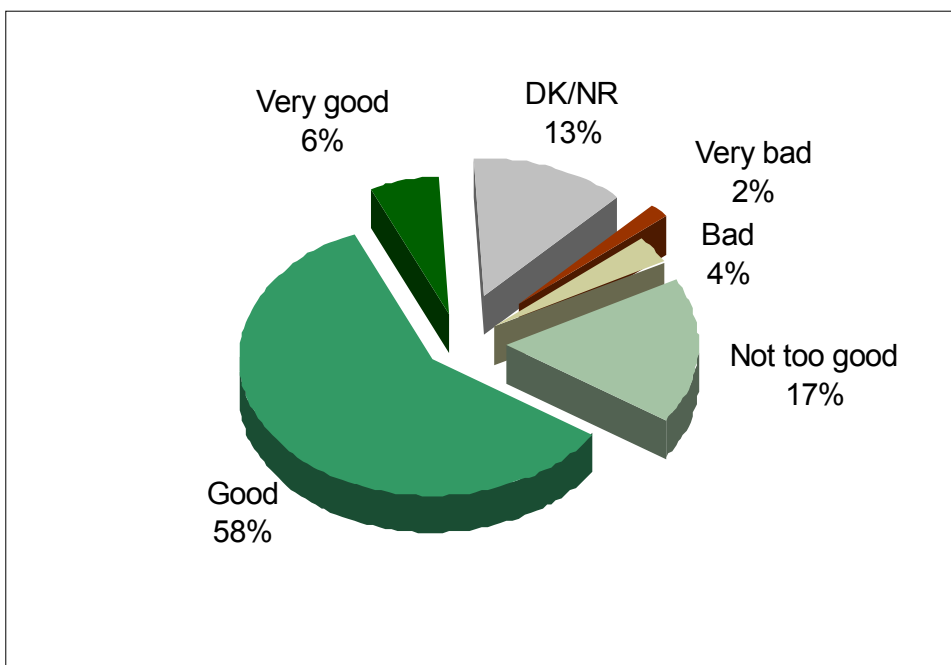


Just like the public opinion, the political elite acknowledges the fact that the President of Romania is the most influential factor in the country's foreign policy. Likewise, the European/EU governments and the American government enjoy the same perception as the one belonging to the public opinion, that is, as having a great influence on our foreign policy, even greater than the one of our own government and in any case much greater than the one of the Parliament. Like the public opinion, the political elite states that the citizens' point of view is the least influential factor in shaping our foreign policy.

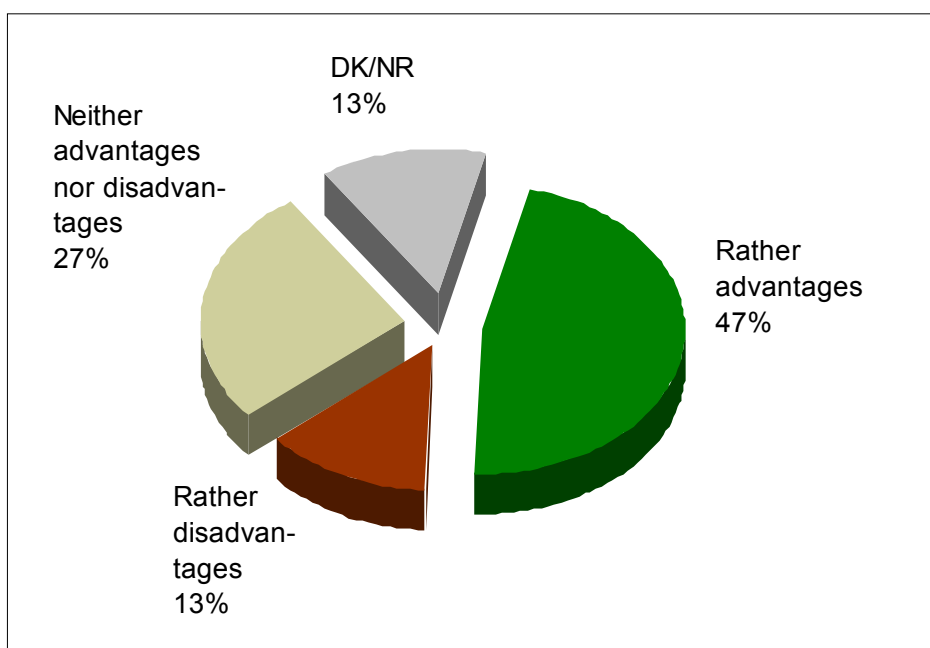
A significant difference between the views of the political elite and those of the citizens regards the threats directed against Romania. Whereas 61% of the Romanians do not perceive any serious threat on our national security, a vast majority of the political elite (15 out of 18) considers that there are serious threats against our national security. Among the most serious threats against Romania's security, the political elite ranks the following: the development of terrorist networks, the development of international organized crime networks and the sources of conflict in the Black Sea area, Transnistria included. Of the 21% Romanians who believe that there are threats against Romania's national security, most of them think that the most serious threats are the terrorist networks, the organized crime networks and the dissemination of weapons of mass destruction and nuclear weapons.

II. ROMANIA-NATO RELATIONS

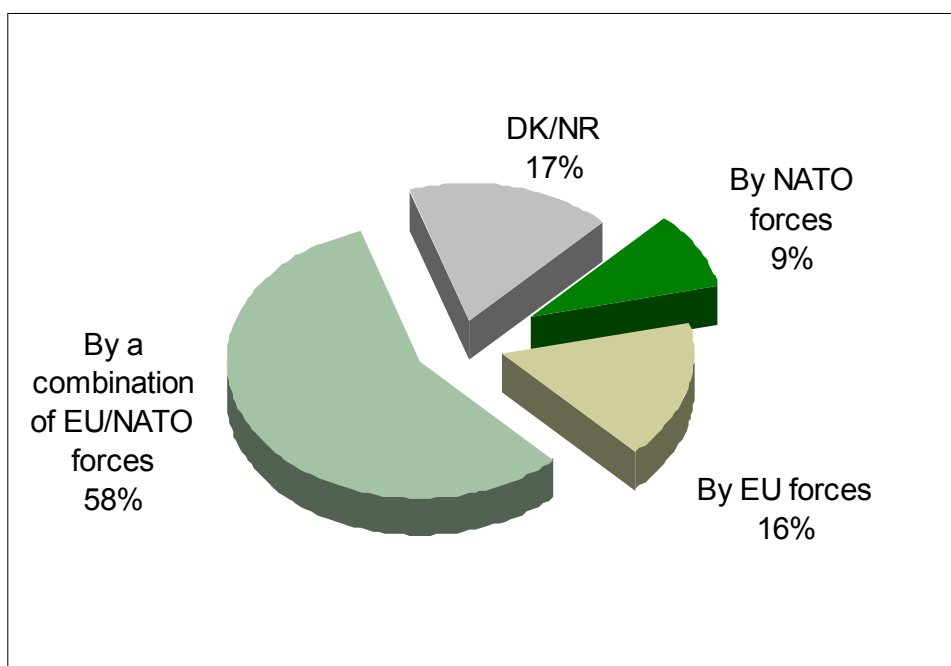
In general, what is your opinion on NATO?



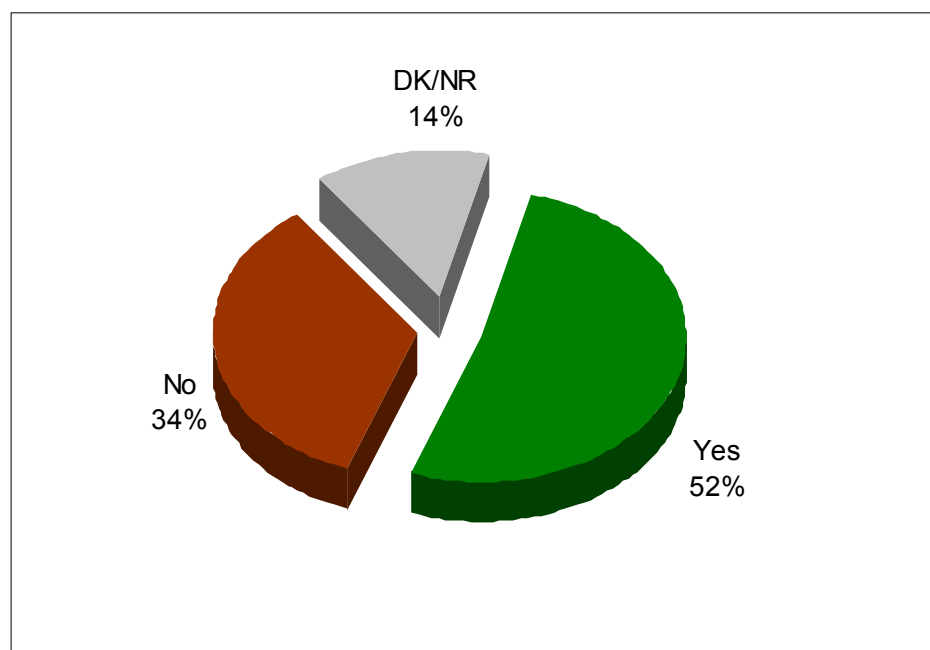
Do you believe that NATO membership brings rather advantages, rather disadvantages or neither to Romanian national security?



In your opinion, how should European security be assured?

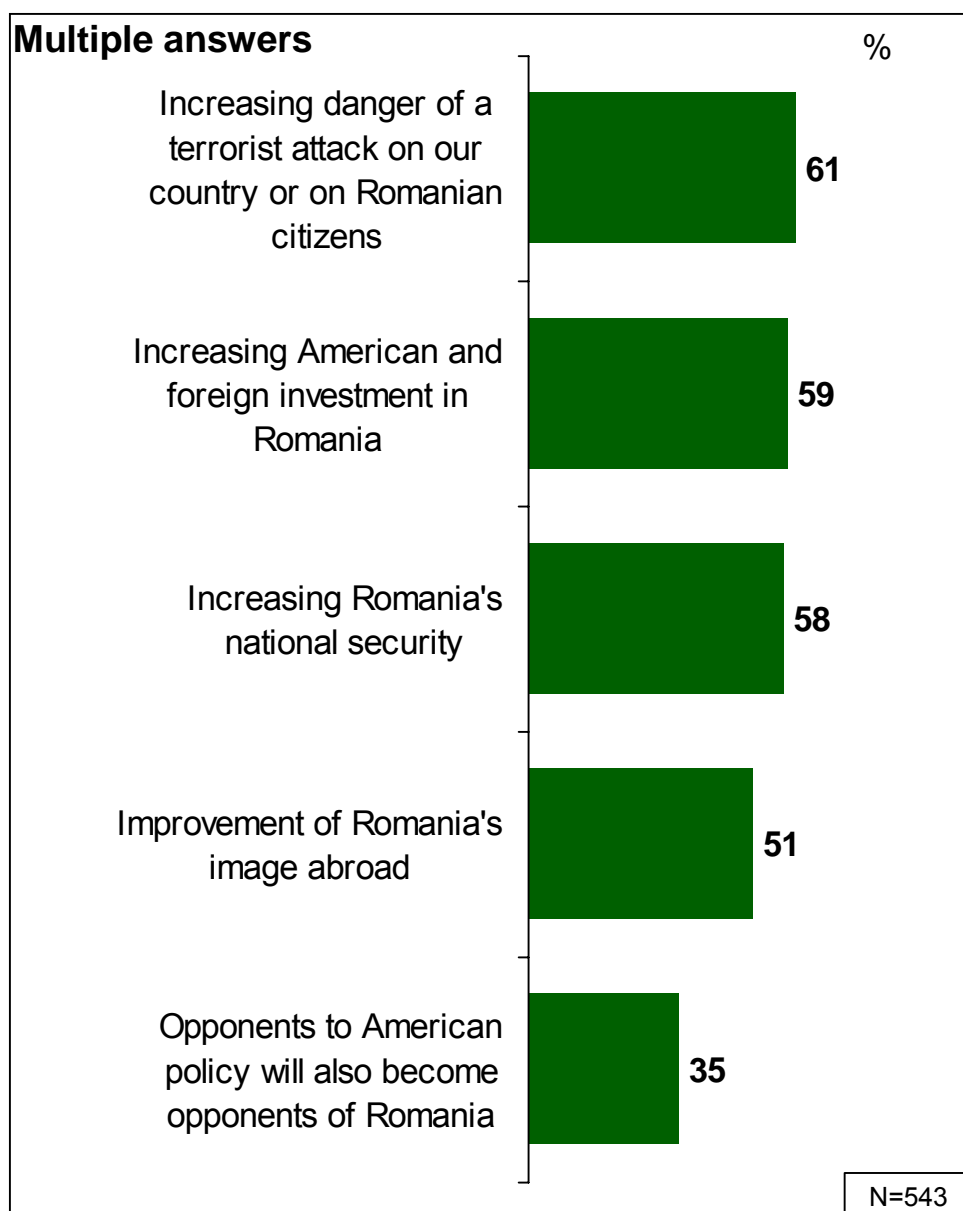


Do you believe that the presence of US military bases on Romanian territory will have any effect on our country?

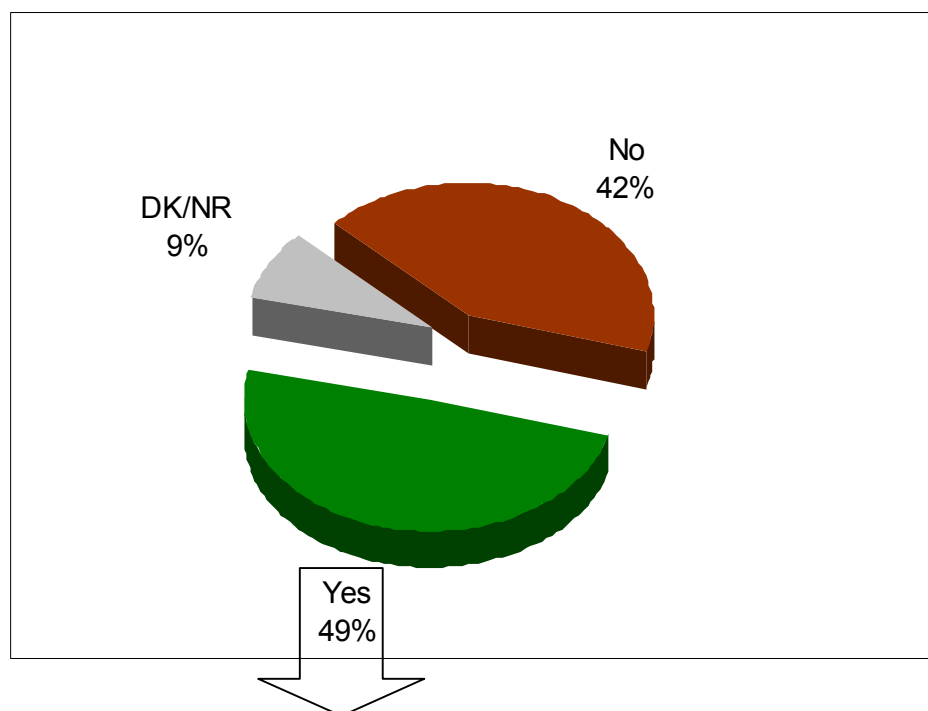


[Only if "Yes, establishment of a military base will have an effect on our country"]

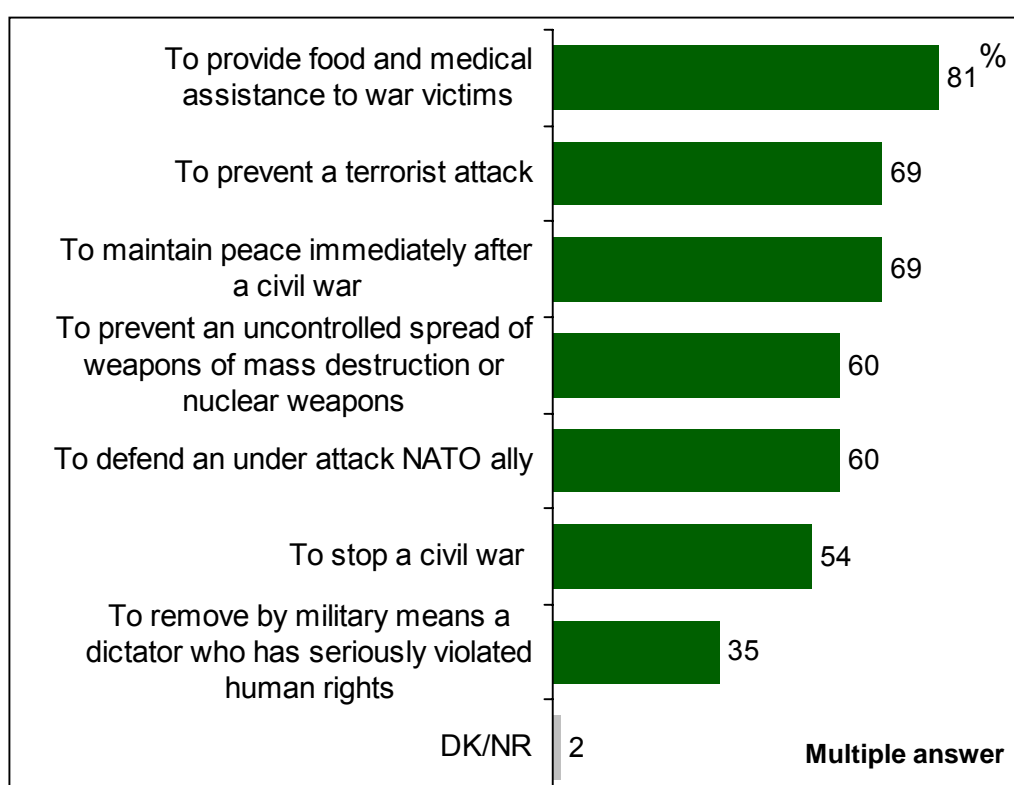
Which one of the following will be the main effect produced by the presence of the US military bases on Romanian territory?



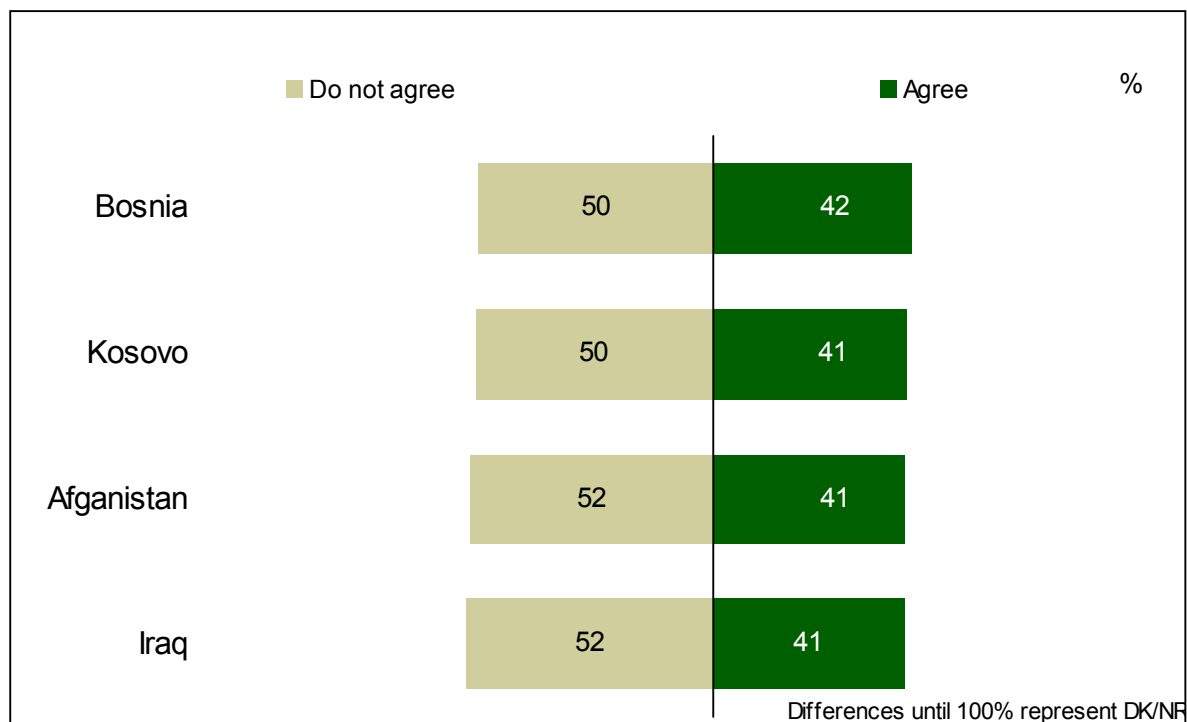
Do you believe that Romania must participate with troops in international missions?



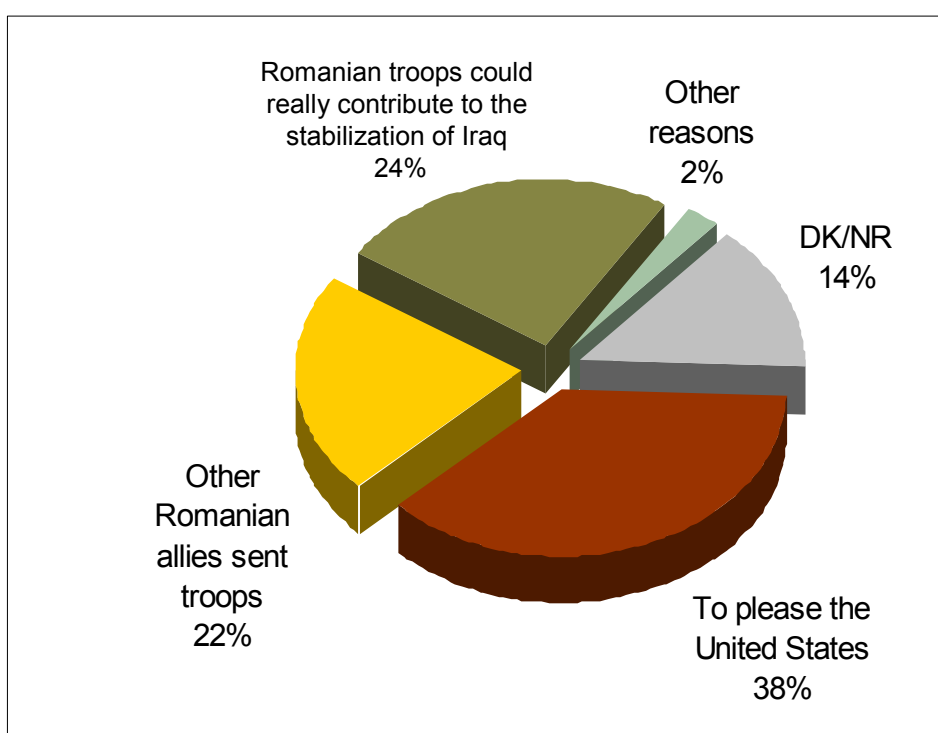
What type of international mission do you think that the Romanian Parliament should approve sending our troops for?



Currently Romania has military/police troops in Bosnia, Kosovo, Afghanistan, Iraq.
Do you agree with their presence in...?



Why do you believe Romania has sent troops to Iraq?

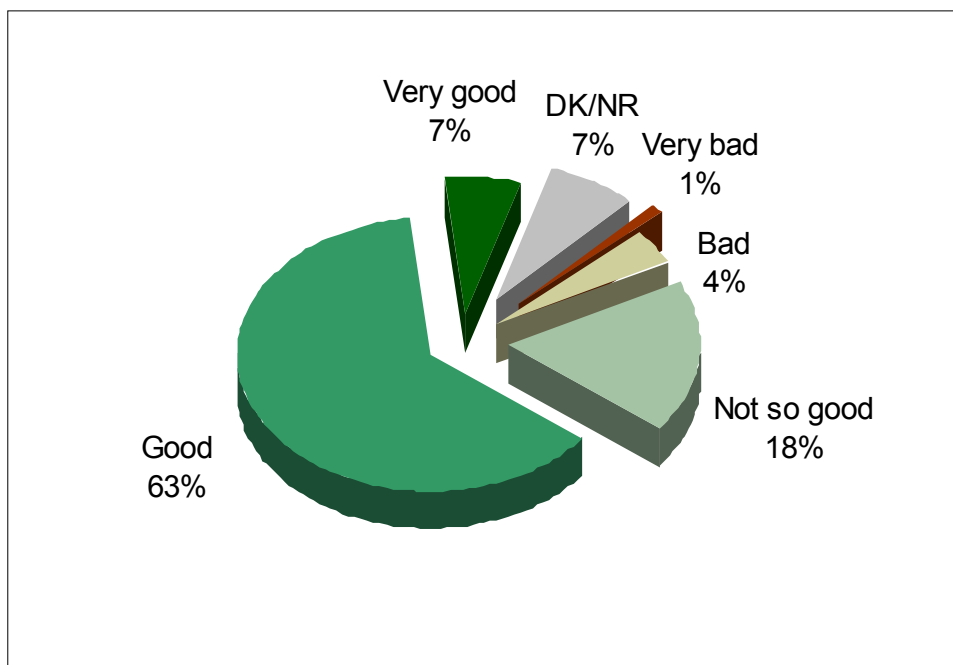


With regard to the transatlantic relationship, the Romanian elite follows, as a matter of principle, the majority public opinion trend, being in favor of a balanced transatlantic partnership. All the 18 respondents - without any exception - agree that European security must be upheld by the NATO plus EU combination. Following the same public tendency, the vast majority of the respondents (13 out of 18) want that the EU becomes a great military power in order to be on an equal footing with the United States; the idea of a competition between Europe and the United States has very little support (1 answer). The same opinion is voiced with regard to the importance held by the EU and the United States to Romania at present - the majority consider them equally important. Likewise, as to the influence of the American government upon our foreign policy, the political elite considers this influence to be „large”. Diverging views are expressed as to the grounds of our presence in Iraq. Although quite a significant number of respondents have told us that the Romanian troops were sent to Iraq in order to please the United States, most of the responses said that this was done because the Romanian troops can really contribute to the stability in Iraq.

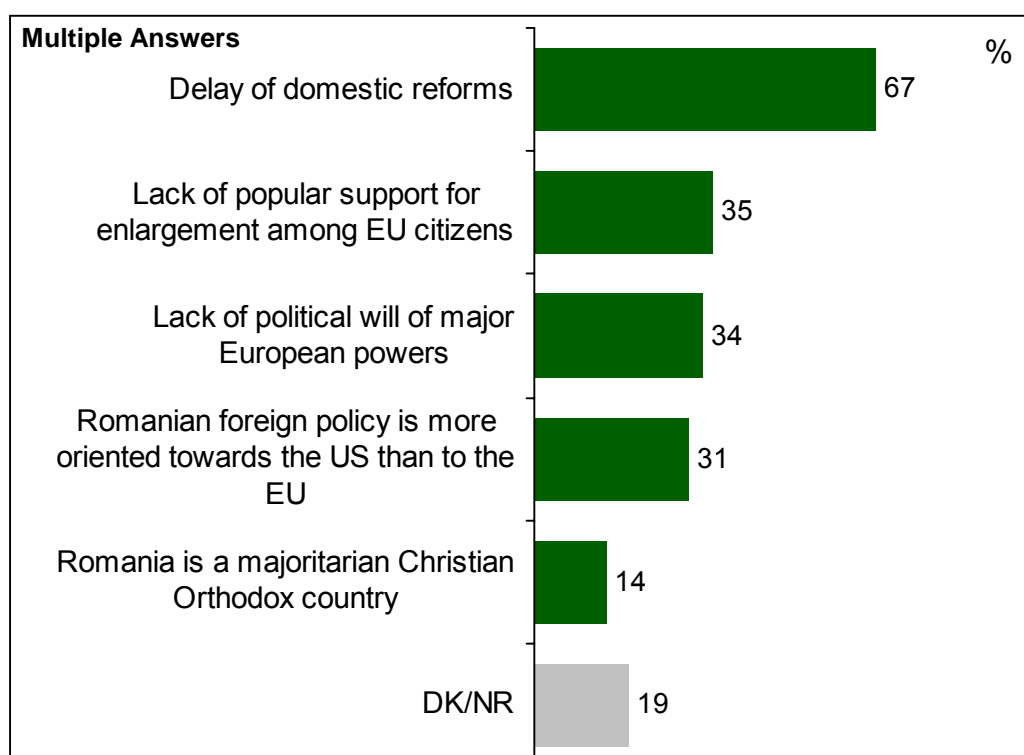
As to the presence of Romanian troops on international missions, a huge opinion gap shows up again between the political elite and the public opinion. Although only half of the public opinion states that Romania must take part to such missions, the political elite interviewed has unanimously stated that it is imperative for our army to take part into such missions. As to the nature of these missions, the opinions converge again. The citizens who agree with the presence of Romanian troops on such international missions believe that the missions to which Romania must participate are meant to supply food and medical care to war victims, to prevent terrorist attacks and to preserve peace right after the end of a civil war; the least public support is enjoyed by the missions meant to stop a civil war and by the ones meant to remove from power a dictator who violates severely human rights. The opinions of the political elite are quite similar; the only difference is that preventing a terrorist attack, preserving peace after a civil war and providing food and medical care to war victims are supported as much as preventing the uncontrolled dissemination of nuclear weapons or weapons of mass destruction. The political elite does not favor either the participation of our army to an international mission aimed at removing from power a dictator who severely violates human rights. We also have to note that, while the political elite understands correctly that Romania must participate to defending a NATO ally that has just being attacked, based on the North-Atlantic Treaty, it is only 60% of the citizens who believe that, as a matter of principle, Romania must take part into such international missions and agree that our army must defend a NATO ally.

III. EU - ROMANIA RELATIONS

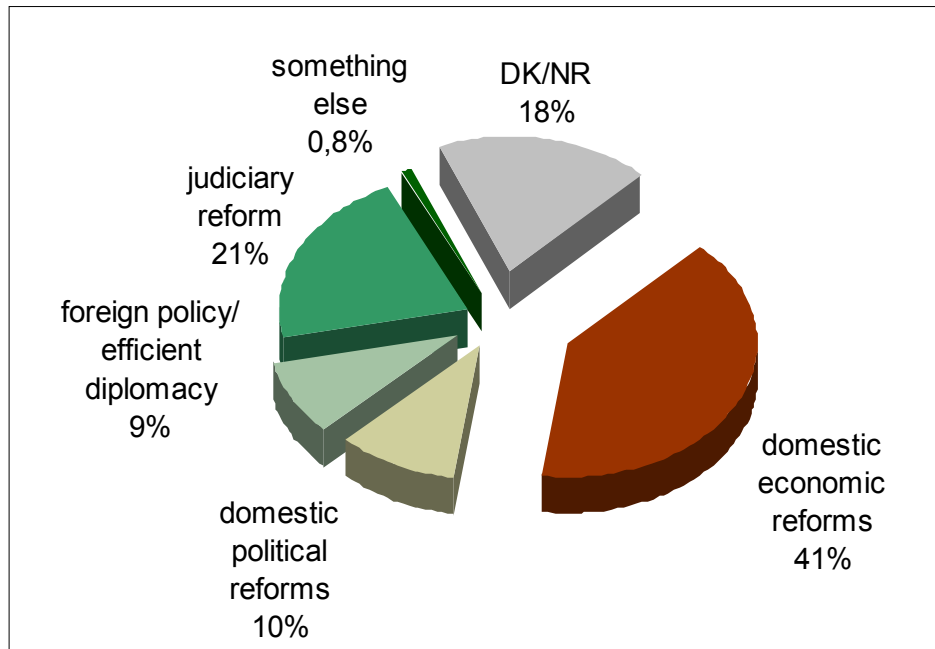
In general, what is your opinion on the European Union?



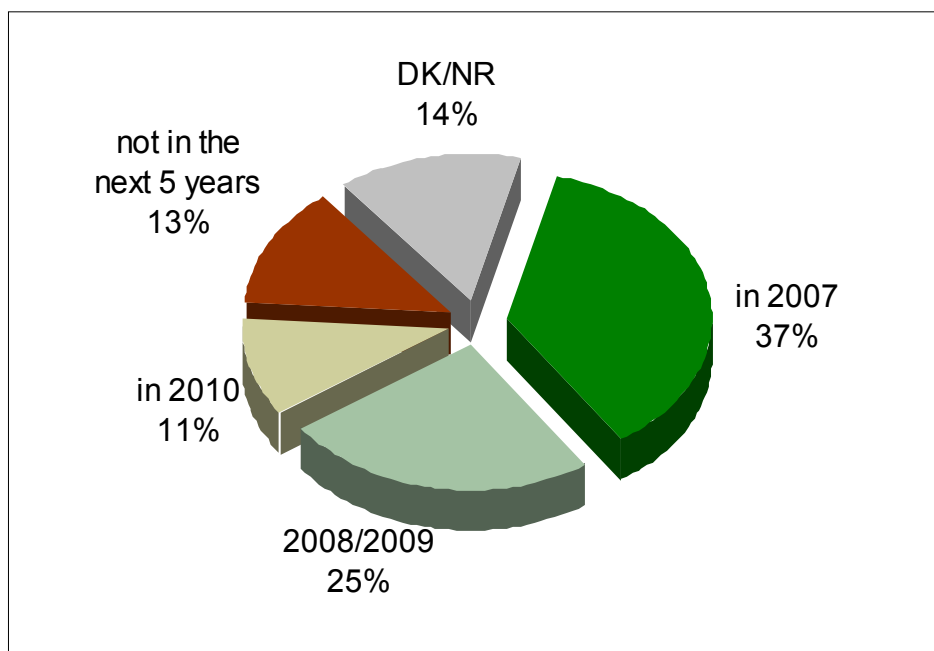
Which one of the following factors could postpone Romania's accession to the European Union?



In the EU accession process of Romania what do you think it matters the most?



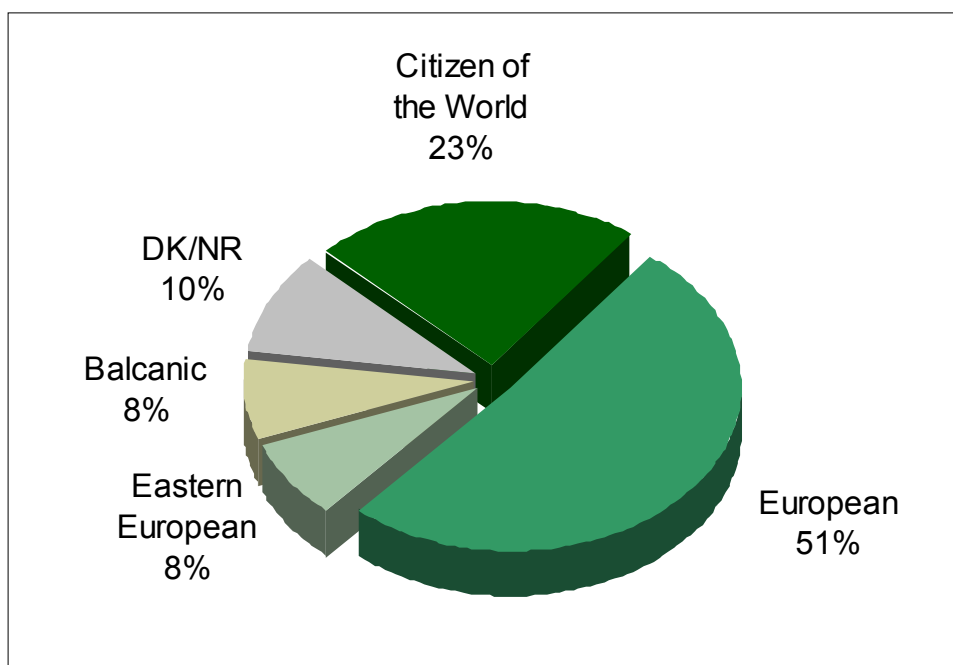
When do you think that Romania will become an EU member...?



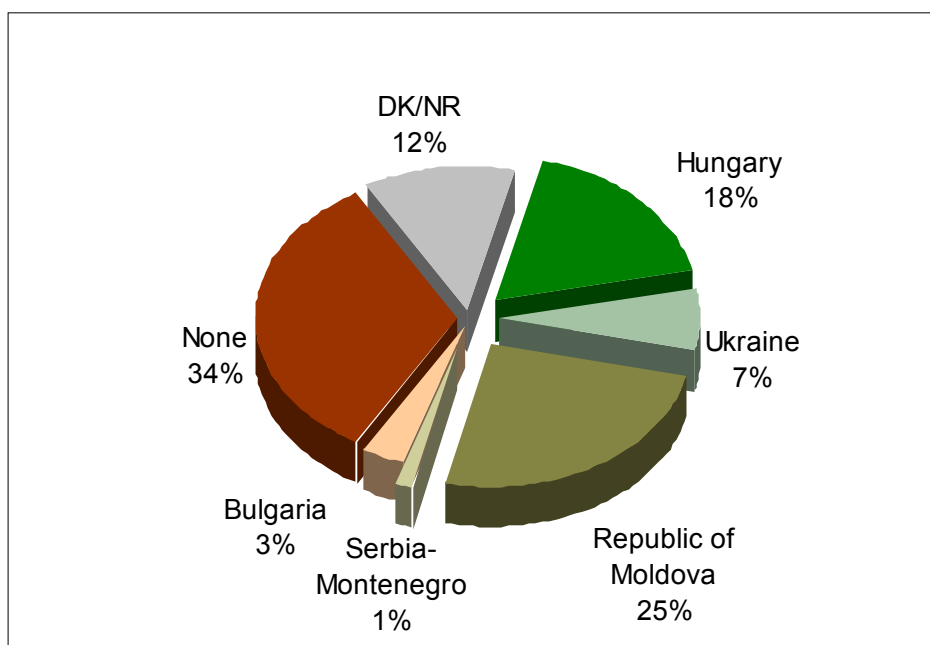
As far as European integration is concerned, the answers of the Romanian political elite are very similar to the ones given by the public opinion. Thus, the elite believe as well that the main cause of a potential delay in Romania's accession to the EU is a delay in its domestic reforms. As to the measures which count most in the accession process of Romania, the elite also ranks first economic reforms, but, on an equal footing, it places the reform of the justice sector. As to the date of accession, a vast majority of the elite who have answered this question (12 out of 18) mention 2007 as the deadline of Romania's accession. In other words, the only source of divergence could be the date of accession: the elite is more optimistic than the population.

IV. ROMANIA-BLACK SEA REGION/SOUTH-EASTERN EUROPE RELATIONS

Apart from your nationality, do you rather consider yourself to be...?



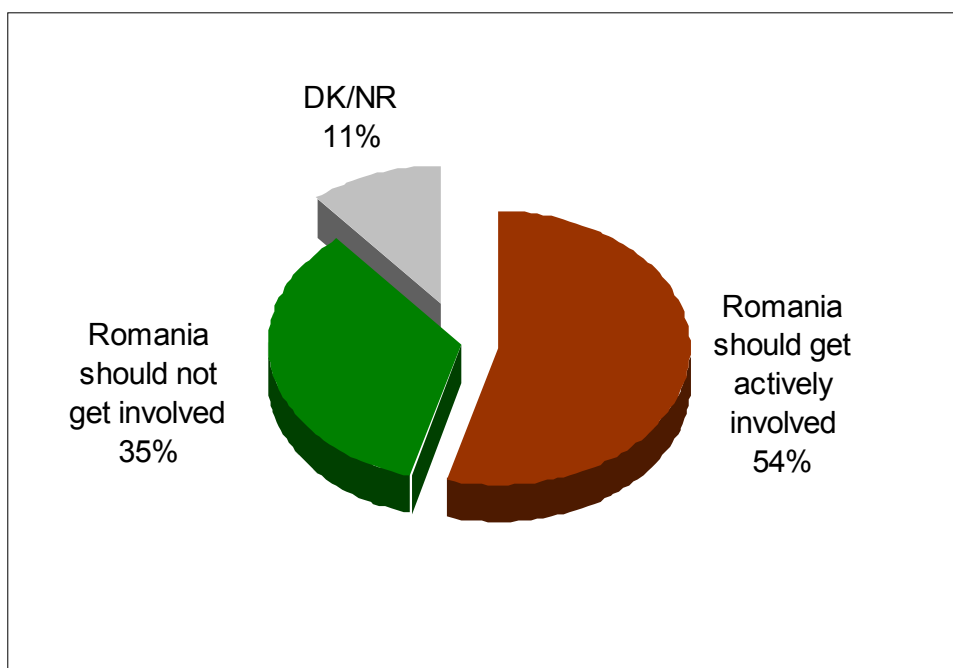
Which of the following relations with Romanian neighbors should be given special attention?



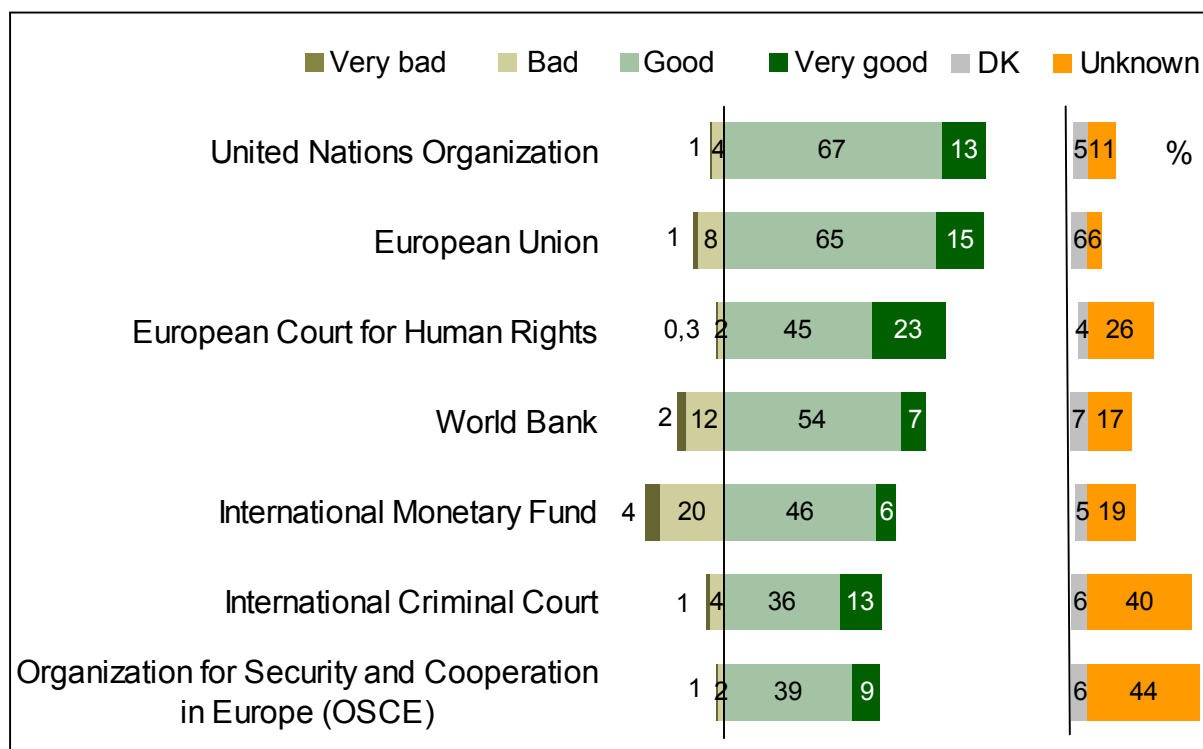
Whereas most Romanians believe that, as far as its neighborly relations are concerned, Romania must not grant to any of its neighbors a special attention, the political elite believes in its majority that such a special attention must be paid to the Republic of Moldova.

V. INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

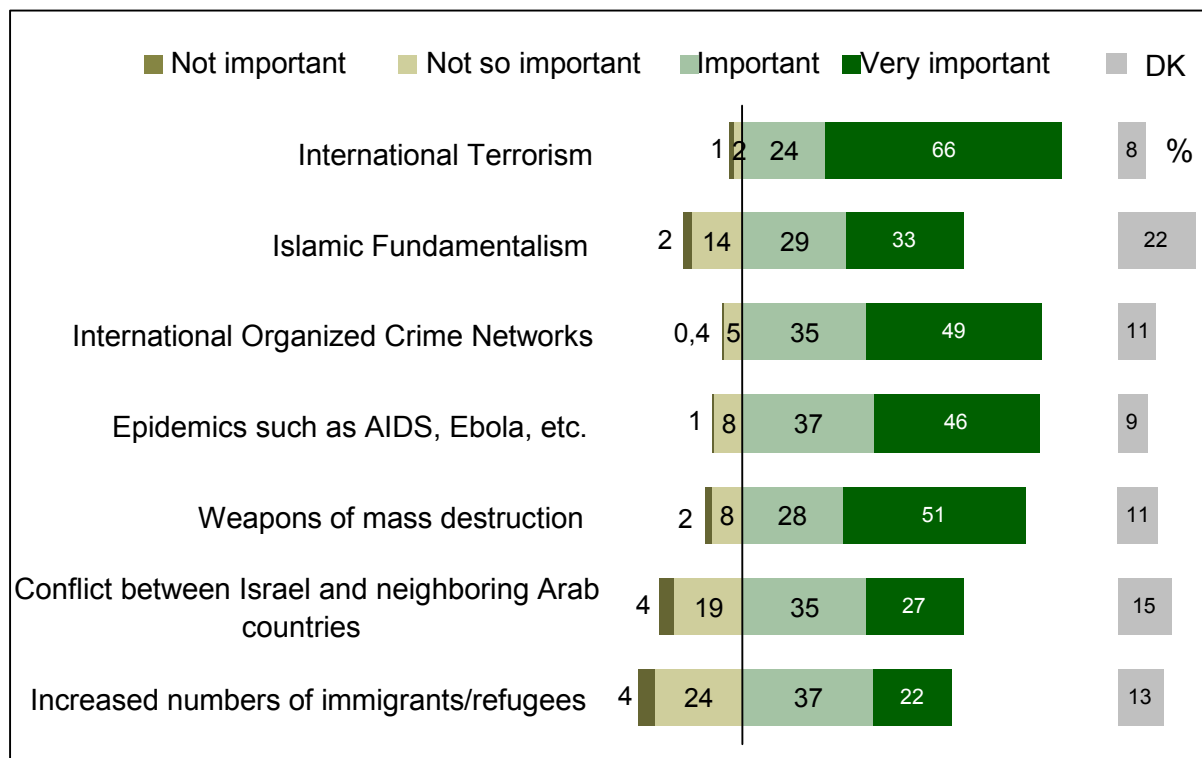
Do you think it will be better if Romania would get actively involved in solving world problems?



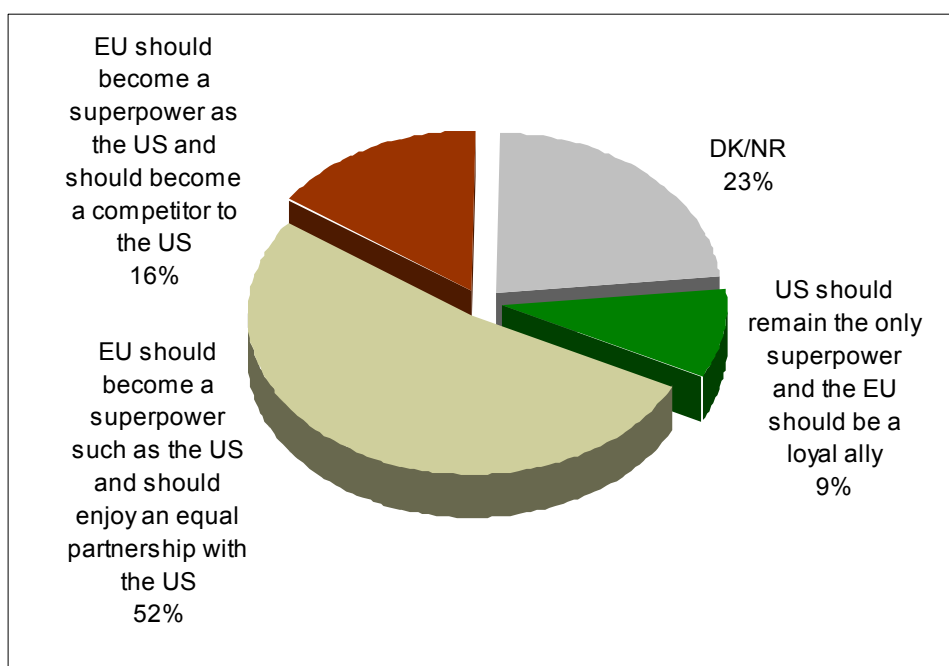
Have you heard of the following institutions or international organizations? If yes, what is your opinion on each one of them?



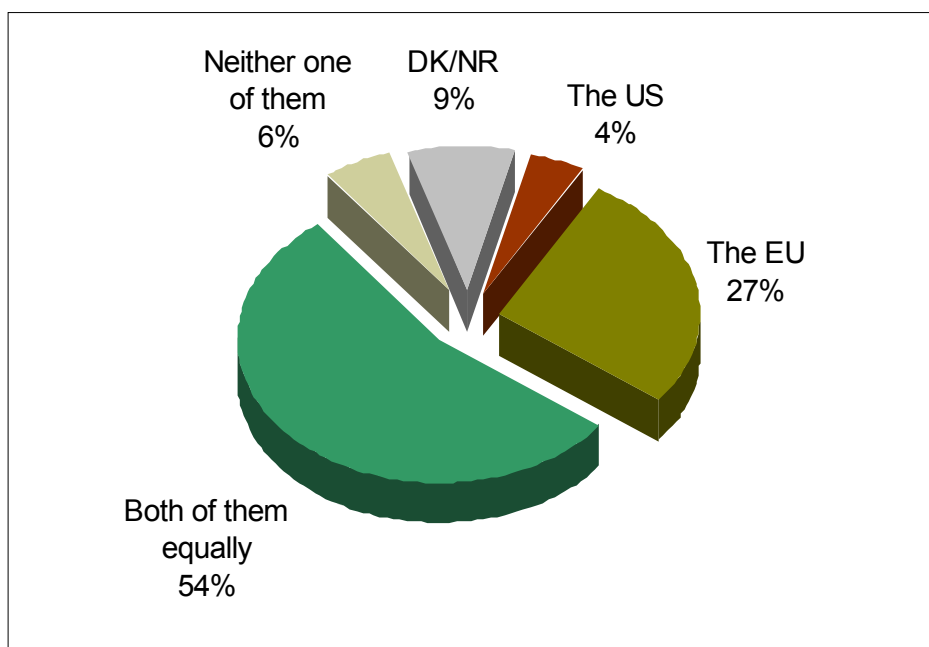
At the international level, how important do you think are the following threats to Europe?



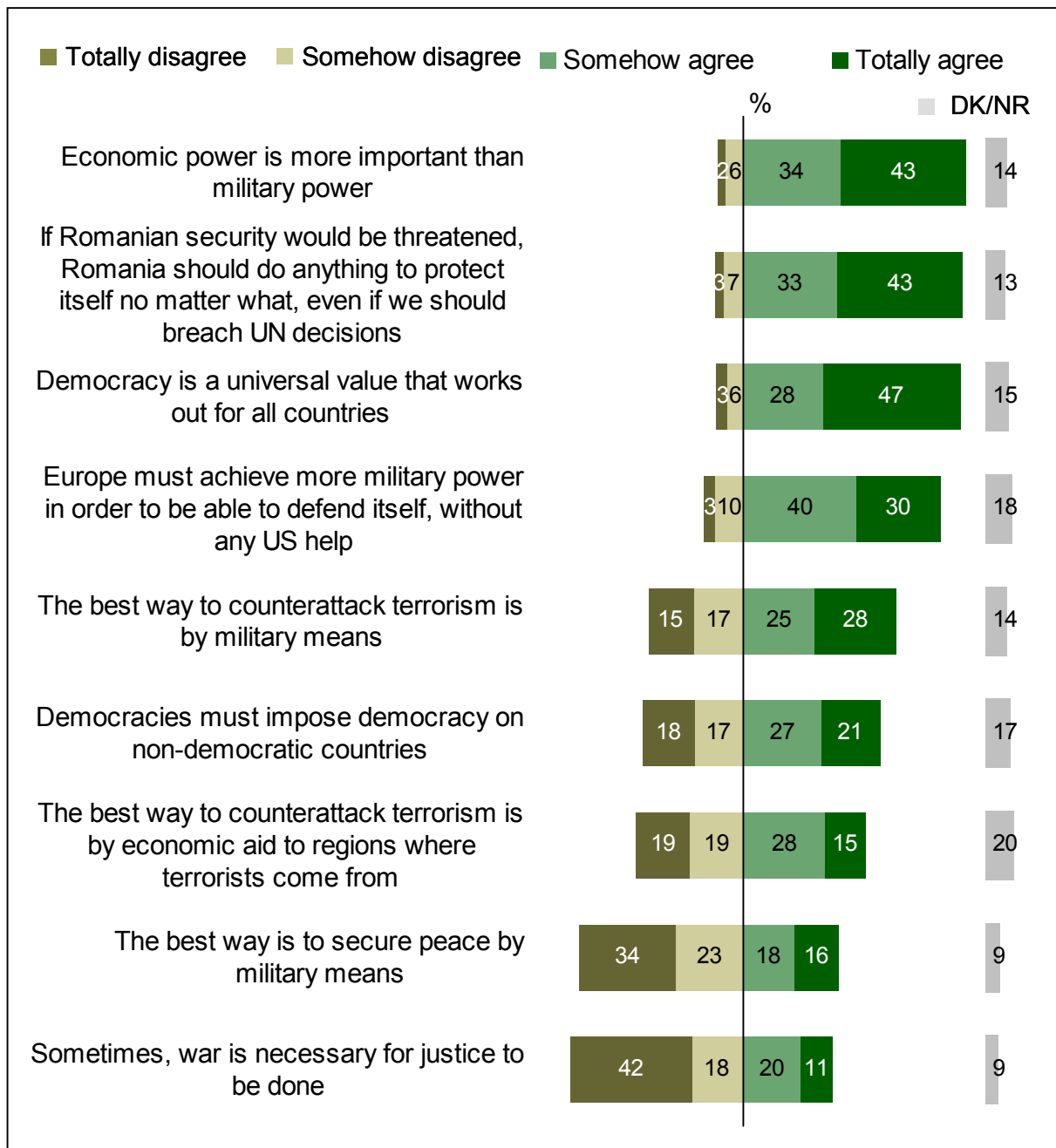
In your opinion, which of the following affirmations best describes the relations between the European Union and the United States of America?

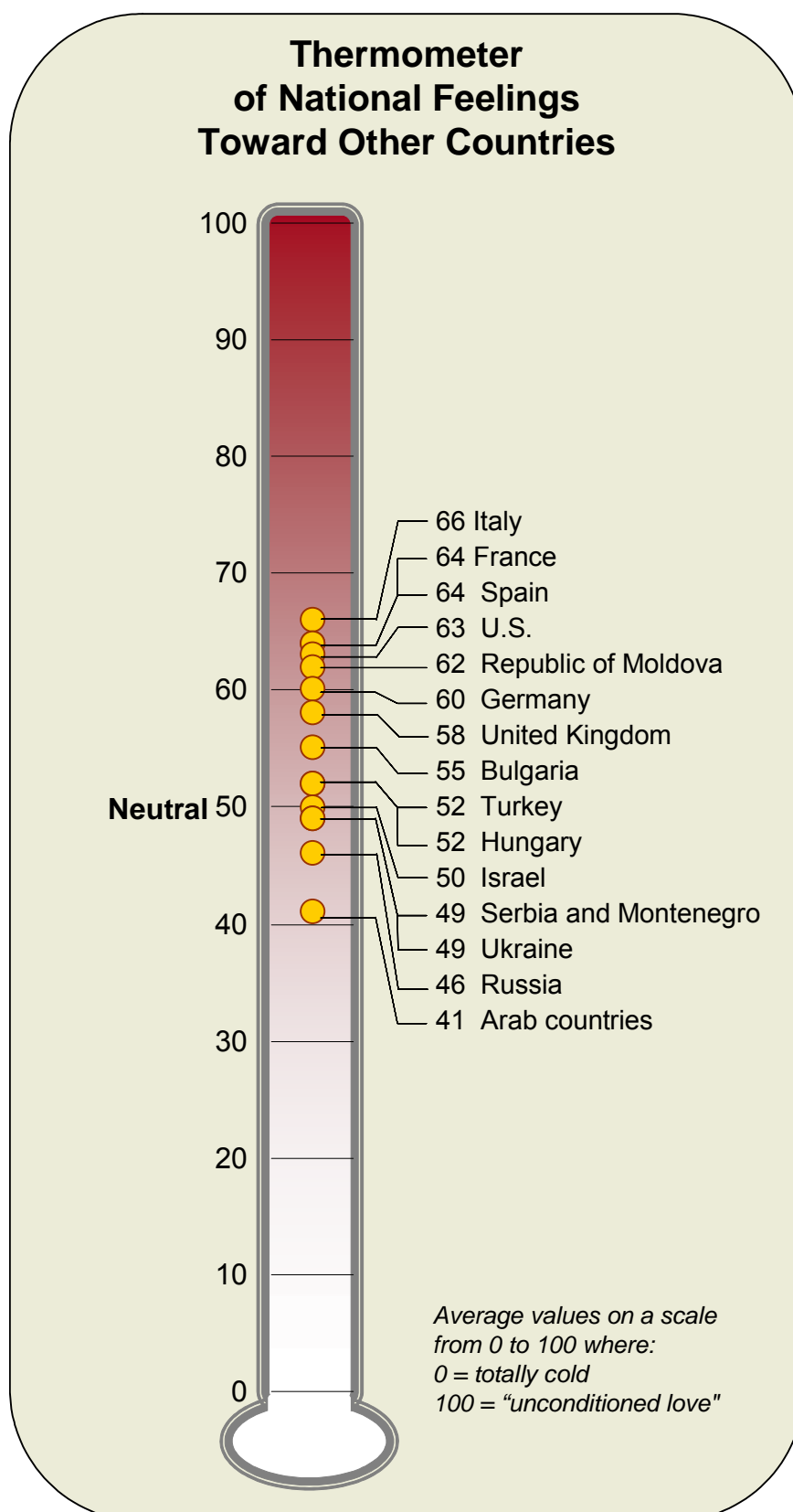


From Romanian national interests' point of view, who do you think it is now more important?

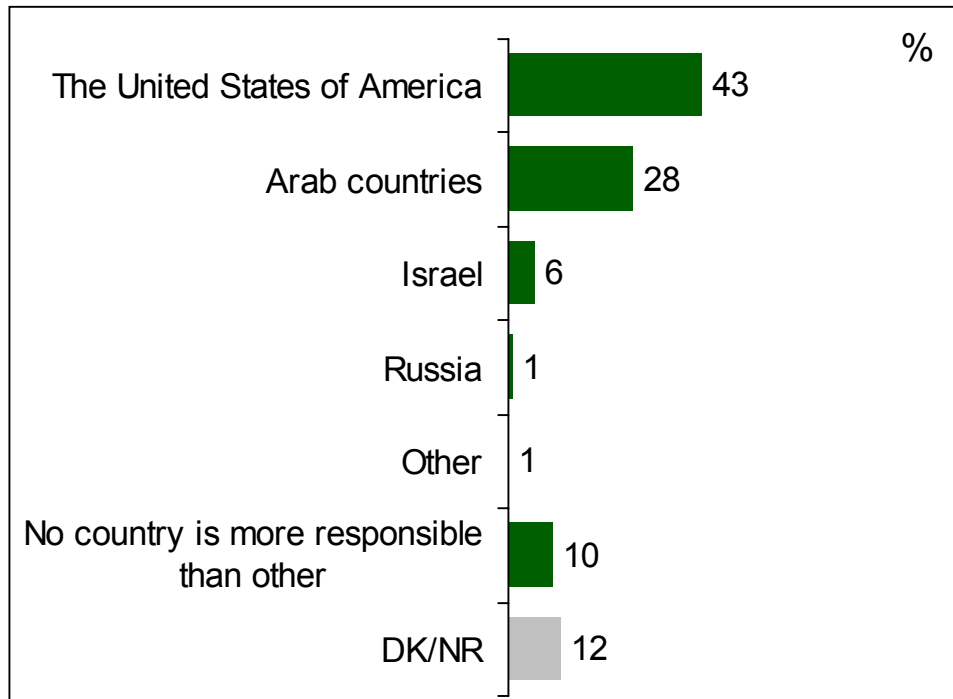


After reading a series of affirmations, please answer if you totally agree, somehow agree, somehow disagree and totally disagree with each of these statements.





Which one of the following countries bears the main responsibility for the tensions in the world?



With regard to the question related to the main source of blame for all the tensions in the world, most of the respondents (11 out of 18) said that no country is more to blame than the other; this answer was given by 10% of the citizens and only 1 respondent has indicated the United States as being the first to blame, which answer was given by 43% of the citizens. The Romanian political elite is as transatlantic in its views as the citizens are, with a stronger inclination towards the United States and a milder criticism against the American foreign policy activities.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

A few **traits of the profile of Romanian public opinion** can be extracted from the current corroborated study. Thus, Romanians are, generally speaking, little concerned with matters of foreign policy and international relations, which makes their level of knowledge in this particular respect to be quite low. There is though a strong traditional attachment to democratic values. Romanians have an unequivocal Euro-Atlantic orientation and they wish for a well-balanced transatlantic partnership. Romanians are rather pacifists, they have a good opinion of international organizations and they have a preference for multilateral approaches. There is also much support as to Romania's involvement in humanitarian missions. At the same time, there is also quite a high level of isolationism, without its being majority-based. There is also a perception that generally matches the European and the American ones, with regard to threats and risks which face security and stability. Likewise, Romanians do have a rather low regional instinct and they tend to project themselves more against the Euro-Atlantic background.

Generally speaking, there are no major discrepancies, fundamental in nature, between the political elite and the public opinion. The main issues which generate **differences** are the following:

- Interventionism and Romania's participation to solving global problems - the elite is one hundred percent in favor of an active and involved approach, whereas the population at large is more in favor of isolationism and non-commitment.
- Threats against Romania's security - the majority of the elite considers that these threats are real, while the general public thinks that to a large extent there are no serious threats against our national security.

Given this state of play, **IPP recommends** the following to the competent authorities:

1. To make public, to a larger extent and more coherently, both the reasons why certain foreign policy events are decided upon, and the official positions on international relations developments
2. To try constantly to collect public support in favor of foreign policy actions, to consult with the public opinion on a regular basis in this respect and to develop an ongoing dialogue with the specialized civil society structures.
3. To initiate public debate meetings on major issues related to our foreign and security policy.

IPP highlights the fact that the citizens' lack of interest and information on such matters is "**a two-edge sword**". The advantage is that, as the population has no bias in this respect and shows no particular concern for issues of foreign policy, it is a fresh-minded and good-faithed recipient of public messages conveyed in this

respect. On the other hand, as it is not informed, the public opinion can be easily intoxicated and misinformed on certain matters, and it can thus easily become a source of pressure. Consequently, IPP considers that **it is incumbent on the competent authorities to inform and involve the citizens coherently in foreign policy decisions.**

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